

ETHICAL DILEMMA Voiding the “License to Discriminate”

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers, a Major League Baseball (MLB) team. Robinson was an excellent all-around player and eventually was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame; but as the first black person on an MLB team, Robinson had to navigate the challenges of being permitted to join the white-dominated league and faced barriers toward “full participation” due to his race.

In the workplace, tokenism refers to minority members being hired into a position because they are different from other members and sometimes to serve as proof that the organization or group is nondiscriminatory. Once in their positions, tokens are given work that would be stereotypically suitable for their demographic. For example, women may be given stereotypically female tasks instead of other tasks that they would be perfectly capable of performing. By engaging in tokenism, organizations may fall prey to

a moral licensing effect, where employers are more likely to engage in prejudicial or unethical behavior when they have initially behaved in a morally acceptable way (such as in believing that selecting or including one minority member is “proof” that the group is nondiscriminatory).

Questions

- 2-12. Can you think of other examples in which tokenism might emerge in the workplace? What are they?
- 2-13. Organizations use a variety of diversity management strategies to make employees more aware of and sensitive to the needs of others. Do you think that these same practices may inadvertently (or intentionally) lead to tokenism or moral licensing? Why or why not?
- 2-14. What do you think can be done to limit tokenism in workgroups and organizations?

Sources: Based on I. Blanken, N. van de Ven, and M. Zeelenberg, “A Meta-Analytic Review of Moral Licensing,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (2015): 540–558; Z. Clay, “Tokenism and Black America,” *Clutch: News & Opinion*, April 2013, <https://www.clutchmagonline.com/2013/04/dealing-with-tokenism-in-black-america/>; R. Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); and L. Zimmer, “Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory,” *Social Problems* 35, no. 1 (1988): 64–77.

CASE INCIDENT 1 Can Organizations Train Diversity?

In Covington, Louisiana, two police officers became certified as cultural diversity trainers. By taking on this role, they have committed to working with other members of the police department to help improve relations between police and the surrounding communities to save lives. Sgts. Jake Lehman and Detective Kevin Collins went to Norman, Oklahoma, where they became certified instructors through the Racial Intelligence Training & Engagement (RITE) academy. RITE seeks to assist police officers in learning ways to understand their biases and improve their communication skills by focusing on emotional and social intelligence, ultimately seeking to improve their ability to deescalate charged situations. “The idea is to deescalate whenever possible—which in turn will reduce use of force incidents,” their police chief Tim Lentz notes.

Many police and public safety departments across the United States are seeing a renewed push to implement or improve diversity training programs because of the contentious nationwide debate surrounding the use of excessive force by police against minorities. For example, a recent settlement between the U.S. Justice Department and the city of Ferguson, Missouri, required the hiring of a monitor to analyze patterns of arrest and force, diversity training for police, and the use of body cameras. These

changes come in the wake of the tragedy in which Michael Brown, an 18-year-old unarmed black man, was fatally shot in 2014.

Overall, diversity training can take many shapes and forms. But how effective is it at improving an understanding of diversity and reducing prejudice? A large-scale review of over 250 independent studies found that trainees react positively to diversity training and that it appears to be quite effective at improving the way trainees think about diversity, although it affects behavior to a lesser degree. Overall, diversity training worked best when accompanied by other diversity management approaches that focused on both diversity skill development and awareness, and when continuously implemented over time (instead of just a one-time training exercise). Many have found that the most effective programs engage people in working toward diversity goals, increase contact among various demographic groups, and draw on people’s desire to help one another.

On the other hand, it appears as if many are not sold on the effectiveness of diversity training. For example, some note that there is a large obstacle to overcome: We are wired to make quick interpretations and automatic judgments. According to the esteemed behavioral economist,